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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0747
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RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1012
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2770
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7505
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000416

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND SCA/RA
MCC FOR S GROFF, D NASSIRY, E BURKE AND F REID

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: DEFENSE SECRETARY OUTLINES SIX-MONTH
MILITARY STRATEGY

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE, JR. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa told visiting SCA PDAS Steven Mann that the government was certain that the LTTE was not interested in a political solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. Nevertheless, he said, the government would try to reach out to the Tamil populations, bypassing the LTTE leadership. The security forces were finding it difficult to choke off LTTE resupply of arms and ammunition, but would redouble its efforts. Security forces would seek to consolidate their hold on the East by driving the LTTE out of its remaining base in Thoppigala, then replace troops in the cities with police and Special Task Force units. He said the Karuna group was not a partner of the government in military operations, but that he saw no problem with the Karuna faction transforming itself into a mainstream political party. The government would try to push the LTTE back in the Vavuniya sector in order to control LTTE infiltration and secure the overland route to Mannar. Then it would press the LTTE to return to the negotiating table. End summary.

12. (C) PDAS Steven Mann, accompanied by Ambassador and Pol Chief, met Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa on March 8. Gothabaya, noting that an overwhelming majority of Sinhalese Buddhists had voted for Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005, told us that his brother's popularity among the majority community was still strong. However, Sri Lanka's system of proportional representation in Parliament meant that the President's party would never secure an absolute majority on its own. This, he explained, had made it necessary to create such a big cabinet to satisfy everyone. Mann responded that the President's considerable political skills and his strong support made him the right leader to make progress on a

solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic problem. The U.S. hoped that the new power-sharing proposals that emerge from the current consultation process would be of a quality that hadn't been seen before.

¶3. (C) Gothabaya told us that the government was sure the LTTE did not believe in a political solution. He said the GSL has recently come into possession of a videotape of a speech by Prabhakaran apparently recorded about two months after the signing of the CFA in 2002. In the video, Karuna was standing next to Prabhakaran and introduced him. Prabhakaran asserted that the LTTE knew it would never reach its goal of a Tamil Homeland ("Eelam") through peaceful means. He told Karuna's cadres, who were about to return to the East, that the CFA only signified a pause for the LTTE, during which they could regroup, rearm, resupply, recruit and retrain. Gothabaya agreed to provide the Embassy a copy of the tape.

¶4. (C) Gothabaya thought the government could reach out to the Tamil people, particularly their educated technocrats. "People need to know that there is a normal life waiting for them after the conflict," he said. It was therefore important for the government to intervene immediately and do development work in the areas in the East that had recently come under its control. The Tamils also needed genuine representation, Gothabaya said. The people had no confidence in the Tamil National Alliance, which was simply a placeholder for the LTTE. On the other hand, Gothabaya asserted that previous attempts by Sri Lankan government to "introduce" alternative Tamil representatives in the North and East had failed, and would not work in the future, either.

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¶5. (C) Gothabaya said that over the next six months, the military planned to consolidate its control over the East, then stabilize the border region adjacent to the LTTE-held Vanni. Vavuniya remained a problem, with much LTTE infiltration, which was also causing problems in an east-to-west arc toward Mannar. In order to secure unfettered access to the population in government-held Mannar, the army would seek to push the Tigers back a bit more. The government would try to deny the LTTE resupply of arms and ammunition, then put pressure on them to return to the negotiating table.

¶6. (C) Gothabaya noted that cutting off arms LTTE shipments to Sri Lanka might be easier than stemming financial flows. The Tigers didn't need to bring the money they raised abroad to Sri Lanka he said, but used it abroad to purchase arms. While the Navy and other security forces had found it difficult enough to choke off LTTE resupply of ammunition, it was worth the effort to try to do so. While Prabhakaran, with his terrorist mentality, would likely never give in, his younger cadre might eventually grasp that there is no military solution to the conflict, he thought.

¶7. (C) Prime Minister Wickremesinghe had visited a number of Southeast Asian countries and concluded MoUs on cooperation against LTTE arms smuggling with several governments, including Indonesia and Thailand, Gothabaya noted. He added that the LTTE arms ship sunk on February 28 had refitted and replenished in an Indonesian harbor. However, Gothabaya thought that the LTTE smuggling operations were not occurring with the approval of those governments, but that certain corrupt officials were abetting them.

¶8. (C) Mann expressed concern that government forces had given excessive freedom to the LTTE-breakaway "Karuna group," which was using this freedom destructively. Ambassador noted that reports from NGOs and international organizations in the Batticaloa area indicated that the Karuna cadres were roaming freely and out of control through the cities, intimidating the population and plundering NGO warehouses of whatever they could use for their bases.

¶9. (C) Gothabaya, smiling, said he had recently received a scolding from his brother, the President, on this matter. He told us that once the army gets control of Thoppigala (the area to which the LTTE retreated from Vakarai), it could assure full governmental control in Batticaloa. "Why go to the effort to clear an entire area just to hand it over to someone else?" The plan, he said, was to hand over control of the towns soon to the police, including the Special Task Force, leaving the military to deal with the jungle fighting.

In the long run, the GSL would need to recruit Tamil and Muslim policemen who would be subject to local control to improve relations with those communities. Previous attempts to recruit and train Tamil-speaking police had failed because they were premature, he thought.

¶10. (C) Gothabaya said that he would not have a problem with the Karuna group emerging as a purely political force. In fact, he said "Karuna as a military force is a myth. It's a plus for us that he's no longer with the LTTE) but all our operations are carried out by the Sri Lankan military. We do not need or want his help."

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Gothabaya's comments on the relations between the Karuna group and the government confirmed what the president had told us an hour before) that the

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government will seek to draw the Karuna group into the political mainstream as a normal political party. Embassy, however, agrees with most observers that the near-term prospects for a return to normalcy in the East in a political landscape dominated by the Karuna group, with its terrorist origins, are remote. Gothabaya's explanation of the government's six-month military strategy pointedly did not include an all-out drive to invade the Tiger-held Vanni and finish off the LTTE once and for all, something that few analysts here feel the government forces could do. On the other hand, there are a number of indications that the Sri Lankan defense leadership is in fact bent on pursuing a decisive military victory.

¶12. (U) PDAS Mann cleared this message.
BLAKE